

Cosponsor the “Safeguarding Homes by Ensuring Licensing and Transparency with Eligibility Requirements (SHELTER) Act”

A bipartisan, bicameral proposal to ensure that unaccompanied children are placed in a safe, state-licensed shelter facility while they await placement with a sponsor.

Background and Need for Legislation:

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is responsible for the care and placement of unaccompanied children in its custody, which it provides through grants to provider facilities across the country. [Several government investigations have recommended](#) that [improvements be made](#) to the ORR shelter grant processes to ensure the safety of unaccompanied children and to safeguard taxpayer dollars from being spent on shelters that will ultimately never open.

Prior to fall 2019, HHS did not require grant applicants to disclose prior adverse actions that had been taken against them by state and local governments. Additionally, until November 2019, HHS had no policy to restrict funding awards to grantees that did not have a state license to operate. As a result, HHS disbursed tens of millions of dollars to facilities that ultimately failed to open when they could not require a state operating license, in many instances due to reports of child abuse and neglect.

For example, the bipartisan Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations released a [report](#) confirming that ORR disbursed over \$32 million in shelter grant funding to two companies with a documented history of failing to provide adequate care of children. Those facilities ultimately never opened, and it is unlikely that HHS will be able to recoup all those funds. More importantly, these unaccompanied children could have been placed in harmful situations.

While HHS has started to require ORR shelter grant applicants to report licensing issues and allegations of abuse at the time of application, these changes are not permanent and could be revoked. The Safeguarding Homes by Ensuring Licensing and Transparency with Eligibility Requirements (SHELTER) Act will codify these recommendations for future funding announcements.

The *SHELTER* Act will:

- Require each grant applicant to disclose any adverse action from the previous five years.
- Require each grant applicant to have a state license to operate a facility caring for children.
- Encourage HHS to collaborate with the appropriate state agencies and check their databases for any information on previous adverse actions taken against the applicant.

Contact:

Please join Representatives David Price and Mariannette Miller-Meeks in strengthening the shelter grant application process by cosponsoring the SHELTER Act. To cosponsor or for additional questions, please contact Nora Blalock at nora.blalock@mail.house.gov and Caroline Bender at caroline.bender@mail.house.gov.